



**Joel B. Shapiro**

United States Army

Army Intelligence Section, XV Corps

European Theater

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Interviewer:  
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**THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY**

**Rick:** Joel did you grow up in Salt Lake?

**Joel:** I'm a native of Salt Lake City. I was born in the LDS hospital at six o'clock on a Sunday morning just before choir practice and you can't get more native than that.

**Rick:** Okay Joe, give us your first name and spell it for us if you would.

**Joel:** Joel Bernard Shapiro

**Rick:** We're really glad to have you with us today Joel and I'd like to begin by just having you tell us about growing up in Salt Lake and how you got into the Armed Forces and where you were on Pearl Harbor Day and what you felt like. Start right after the LDS Hospital.

**Joel:** I grew up in Salt Lake City, went to Stuart Training School which is on the University of Utah Campus, which was originally what would be the predecessor of a charter school today I guess. Bryant Jr. High, East High, I was an active participant in East High stuff, yearbook, newspaper, political organizations all that sort of thing. Then I went to school at the University of California at Berkeley, which indicates that I was and still am wild eyed liberal, why not? The world needs more of us.

**Rick:** I can't agree with you more.

**Joel:** The Army thing is, I had gone through Senior ROTC and went directly from school to Officers Canada School in Ft. Benny, Georgia where I completed 15 ½ weeks of training and I was tossed out of OCS because I overstayed a pass. And that ended me up as being just a regular GI, I was sent over seas with a group of men who were designated as replacements and we were told, this was prior to the invasion, we were told that we were to be replacements for dead men, which is a very encouraging high morale type of statement to hear. Where I was with them for a couple of months or so, eventually I was called off the field, a young man lieutenant said, "*Do you like what you're doing here?*" and I said, "*Not especially.*" Let me tell you what he said

and I'm not trying to be immodest but he said, "*You have the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest IQ in the ETO (European Theater), you ought to be doing something else.*" And I said, "*Name it.*" And with that he said, "*We'll pick you up at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning.*" Which they did and I ended up wherever I spent the rest of my service time in G2 of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, G2 being the staff section intelligence, intelligence section; where largely I was just a glorified clerk I spent my time.

**Rick:** Let's get back, where were you on Pearl Harbor Day?

**Joel:** Pearl Harbor Day I was at Berkeley.

**Rick:** So you were still in college then?

**Joel:** Yes, I was still in school. I lived in the International House, if you might know what that is, that was a Rockefeller endowed institution bringing foreign students together and so forth. We blacked out our windows because we were right across from San Francisco Bay and we thought the Japanese were charging through the bay; and that was an interesting time.

**Rick:** So they had everybody blackout their windows?

**Joel:** Everybody in the San Francisco, Oakland area was told to blackout windows so that those Japanese ships, which nobody knew where they were or what they were, so that was a first.

**Rick:** Well that's interesting, we haven't talked to anybody that was right in San Francisco right opposite the bay and they thought an attack might have been imminent.

**Joel:** Well, listen; there was a great ocean of fear in those first days. I don't know if President Roosevelt and the defense department knew what everything was going on, but certainly the populous didn't.

**Rick:** Tell us the attitude of Berkeley students about the war.

**Joel:** Well there was a great deal of fear because of this kind of instruction to blackout windows and so forth. A lot of kids ran home, there's no question about it. I had a lot of friends, this is December 7<sup>th</sup> right, their parents called and the mom's said get yourself on a train – we didn't travel by planes, but choo choo trains, so a lot of kids left no question about it.

**Rick:** Was there an attitude there at Berkeley either pro or con about the war in Germany at that time, did they not want to get involved in it or how did that?

**Joel:** You're asking, was America still an isolationist position? Well, I think history reminds us that Franklin Roosevelt had with the lend lease program and so forth was building up an accommodation as far as an accommodation to move the American public towards a more acceptance of its eventual involvement, I think the young people at least in the groups that I hung out with, probably felt it was coming and were probably ready for it. I said I lived in International House, I said I was a Berkeley liberal which would indicate that I was ready to be more of an internationalist than a isolationist if that's the direction you're going here.

**Rick:** No, I was just curious about the thoughts down there at that time. Now tell us a little more detail, you signed up for OCS and then give us some more detail about your basic training and getting over to Europe and where you went.

**Joel:** As I said, I had four years of Senior ROTC. Prior to that last event, that is the December 7<sup>th</sup> Pearl Harbor Day, people went directly from Sr. ROTC to being commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. After December 7<sup>th</sup> there was a little tighter system which was certainly very proper, instead of being directly commissioned you were sent to Officer's Training School which is where I was sent along with everybody else in my class. And as I said, I blew it. I was dismissed four days before graduation, but it probably saved my life. I would've been a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant of infantry instead of a Sergeant in a G2 section of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps. So fate moves in strange ways, I was saddened, dispirited, disheartened, teary when it happened, I had to telephone my mother and dad and tell them I'd been booted – that's tough on a kid. But the rest is okay.

**Rick:** It's interesting, you're absolutely right because those 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants in the infantry.

**Joel:** Easily disposable. As I mentioned to Sally, at that moment, this is prior to the invasion, and they were turning out young officers at a huge rate so there was a surplus. After the invasion there was never any surplus and you had young Lieutenants being made overnight as it were far less trained than I certainly was.

**Rick:** Then when they sent you into the infantry did you have basic training or boot camp you had to go to?

**Joel:** They sent me to the 75<sup>th</sup> Division which was an infantry Division in training in Louisiana, where me, this little westerner with a Berkeley background was set down amongst a bunch of southern, I hate to say it as a descriptive thing, rednecks. Kids that couldn't have been farther removed from where I was emotionally, developmentally and so forth. And it was a very difficult time for me and the end of it is I really volunteered to get out of there, and I made a deal with an Officer I said, *"I'll volunteer, can you arrange for me to have a week home?"* because after OCS I never got it. And he said, *"Oh sure, I'll take care of ya."* And I said, *"Okay, you've got your man."* Six days later I'm walking up a plank in New York and my mother and dad took a train and came out to see me and saw me the night before I shipped out. So that's how it all happened.

**Rick:** What did you volunteer for then?

**Joel:** Well, when they assigned me to the 75<sup>th</sup> Division they didn't know what to do with me. Here's this guy with 4 years ROTC, 16 weeks of OCS, what are you good for? So they made a clerk out of me, I had two stripes, they made a clerk out of me and we were in a clerk's pool in a divisional clerk's pool, maybe 12-14 guys. And we sat around there doing not too much. Then this personnel officer walked in and said he had to have, I believe it was four or five of you clerks, Company Clerks we were called, we have to take four or five of you and put you in a replacement pool. Well of course the guys froze, but I was so down on myself I guess, that I

would've done anything to get out of where I was, it was nothing grand it was nothing brave, it was probably just a dispirited feeling of my own and that's how I volunteered. I volunteered to get out of something I didn't volunteer to go somewhere, there's a difference.

**Rick:** So that got you out of being with all those southern redneck guys?

**Joel:** In a sense. And as I say, they promised me a week's leave which never happened.

**Rick:** So in 6 days you were embarking on a boat, your parents had to come out and say goodbye to you?

**Joel:** They did and they saw me the night before I left.

**Rick:** All right, so take us there walking up that plank and what happened after that.

**Joel:** Well, I was assigned to what they call the replacement battalion and that was in Northern Ireland. Most of these kids that were in that replacement battalion were younger than I, if I may say so, rawer than I. I ended up with a squad because I had two stripes and they started to train us in terms of using weapons, hardening exercises, long marches with full pack and all that. And you've got to remember I was only 5'7 1/2" and about 135 or 140 pounds, I was very light and small I was not a big strong muscular fellow. So that wasn't easy although I tried to the best, I did okay. I was out one day in a trench teaching these kids how to throw grenades, you've seen movies, you have to do it correctly or you can hurt yourself. So I was teaching kids how to throw grenades and I got a call to come to the company commander's office where there was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant and he interviewed me, and that's the story I told. "*Do you like what you're doing here?*" Well the morale in that unit was so poor, everybody came from someplace else, there was no consistency, there was no camaraderie it hadn't developed yet, you were told that you were replacements for dead men, I mean how do you build morale in a group like that? The food was bad, the supplies were impossible, there was no discipline, it was terrible. So when he asked me, "*Do you like what you're doing?*" I had to confess that it was not the most agreeable thing I had ever expected out of life. So he said, "*Would you like to do something else?*" and that's

when he made the statement, I'm quoting him, "*You have the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest IQ in the ETO you ought to be out of here.*" I said, "*I'll leave anytime.*" And that's how I was picked up the next morning at 6 O'clock, I said, "*Where are you sending me?*" and he said, "*I can't tell you.*" Big Army secret, where are you sending our corps pool? I mean that's high-class stuff. I was picked up in a truck all by myself and I ended up leaving Ireland and going down all the way to a base in England. Do you remember the limerick; she shall have music wherever she goes with bells on her fingers and rings on her toes? That's the name of the city, that's where I was, what was the name of that city? It's just outside, not far from Oxford, England. When I checked in, he had just told me to go to, he was going to send me to something worthwhile from my meager talents. I checked in, naturally it was the Army, they didn't know why I was there, nobody under the sun knew why I was there. They told me to go over to the barracks and find a bunk and go to sleep and check in every other day and see if they could find out why I was there. I guess it was almost two weeks, I'd go over every other day to this Master Sergeant and he'd say, "*I don't know why you're here, go back.*" So I started going over to Oxford and Stratford and the plays were still going on, well this was a joy to me because I would hitch a ride to Stratford upon Avon and see the Shakespearean plays and I must have done that a half a dozen different times. So that's an experience that was really wonderful and subsequently I've been back to Oxford and Stratford upon Avon and I took my wife and I tried to remember the places, of course its been built rebuilt and changed so nothing looked the same, nor did Normandy when I went back to see it.

**Rick:** Did you have any experiences on the Troop Ship going over?

**Joel:** Yes, I can tell you about ME. I was an only child and therefore, perhaps being used to being alone, and I was not a gregarious person neither am I now, I'm essentially shy and withdrawn. I remember finding each day to find a place on that ship where I could sit in a corner and read. I'd stuff my pockets with little books and magazines and I didn't mix well at all, and that journey, besides getting sick, was tedious but what about ME on the ship I didn't make friends, I didn't generate a society or a social circle – not much at all.

**Rick:** How many days was it?

**Joel:** I don't recall, 7-8.

**Rick:** You were attending Shakespeare plays at Stratford upon Avon.

**Joel:** And then finally when they found a job for me, what it was, they attached me to the G2 section of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps. And that was nothing more than a glorified clerk, I didn't break codes or anything, I did work with, after the invasion overseas, with the interrogation team or the Order of Battle Team and the people that interrogated higher ranking prisoners. But that's how I got there. And the next event, of course, is the shipping out from; you want to hear a short story about General Patton?

**Rick:** Absolutely. You were there and experienced it.

**Joel:** Well, the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps was getting ready to go overseas. When we came down from Ireland, when I came down from Ireland being attached to this group, when I got there everybody was scurrying around removing all identification. Now you've seen army vehicles, they have in white letters the company or the corps or division written all over them, every barracks bag, every piece of paper has a unit name on it of some sort. So prior to the invasion the order came down to remove all markings, and that was the time when the campaign was on *'Loose Lips Sink Ships'* so everyone was told not to talk when you went to Stratford or something, you were never to mention your unit, you were never to say anything. So it was hours and hours and hours of work to remove every possible point of identification from any garment, instrument, vehicle and so forth; a lot of labor. So just prior to the invasion we get the notice, form up, we have a big time visitor coming; so headquarters coming the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps forms up in front of a stone wall, and elevated stone wall perhaps 5-6' high. And the vehicle draws up, and who gets out but his eminence George Patton, and he strides up, stands on this top wall on top of this wall with those shiny guns on each hip, just the way George Scott portrayed him in the movie, pearl handles and snappy boots. And he stood up there on that wall and he put his hands on his hips and he says, *"I don't give a goddamn who knows the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army is in Great Britain!"* Well nobody put any names back on the material but that was a great moment. So that group I was with, the 15<sup>th</sup>

Corps, we got onto the belly boats and I think we left from South Hampton and crossed the Channel. And I can't be totally accurate of the day; I think it was either 7 or 8 days after the D-Day that I came in on Normandy beach. So thank god it was not 7 days earlier. By that time the beach was cleared of course and there was a lot of trash around, vehicles and so forth and guns and stuff, material. But you know, we got on an LST and like in the movie when they dropped the LST the guys jump into water, I jumped onto a nice dry piece of land.

**Rick:** You come in on a Higgins's boat just like the invasion forces and they dropped you right off in the sand?

**Joel:** Yeah, I didn't get my feet wet; well of course the funny thing was that when we left, the Higgins boat was the troop transport wasn't it?

**Rick:** The Higgins boats were those landing crafts that the front end went out.

**Joel:** Well we came over on something else across the Channel on a bigger boat, we went over the side on a rope ladder and jumped into that Higgins if that's what it was. And the argument was, as you came off the edge of the larger craft and when down the rope ladder, should you tie your strap chin – your helmet strap under your chin or should you leave it loose? If you tied it of course it couldn't fall off, but the danger was if you got caught on anything you could get choked to death. So there was an argument, do you leave the straps open or closed? I chose to leave mine open, I didn't like the idea of being caught on something and being strangled. So when I came down the rope ladder and the sea was moving up and down and you jumped into that Higgins, I jumped in and dropped and my helmet flew off and it went into the sea and so shortly after we were landing and for several days after that every time some Sr. Officer would see me walking around without a helmet he would say, "*Where's your helmet soldier?*" and I'd say, "*It's in the sea, sir!*" and I would get repeatedly called up and called down because I'm the only guy walking around without a helmet. And because there were no extra helmets, they didn't ship helmets over and nor did they ship pens or pencils on the first move, anyway I finally got a helmet but that was funny.

**Rick:** Tell us as much detail as you can, what happened after that around Normandy.

**Joel:** When 3<sup>rd</sup> Army went into Normandy there have been many stories told and its very visible in my minds eye where the hedge roads on that peninsula. The hedge roads were a result of years and years of cultivation and small farms as it were, and every hundred yards or so there was a wall of a mound of earth as these areas had been cultivated and so forth. So there were square after square after square after square and the original troops were still in that area, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army came in and it was packed full of people. The infantry troops had trouble getting through those hedge roads because, even with tanks, the tanks would belly up against those mounds of earth. So we just sat there for days and we were strafed usually every night, not with a concentrated Air Force Strafing but the German patrols knew that area was packed with people and they would send a plane or two planes in at night and just scatter bullets, you know. You got used to that after awhile, it was frightening at first. Then we sat on our dock there with everybody else there until the big breakthrough, what was it called, a San Low Breakthrough?

**Rick:** After the bulge or during the bulge?

**Joel:** No, the breakthrough was when all of these troops, including the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army got out of that peninsula and into the plains, into the battlefield. And that's where the action began.

**Rick:** Did you have to stay in foxholes when you got there or where did you sleep?

**Joel:** No, you may have forgotten, or was it ever written? George Patton said, "*Thou shall not dig a foxhole, anybody, anywhere, anytime.*" Because foxholes were essentially a defensive action, right? He said, "*There will be no foxholes in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.*" That ended that discussion, which was funny because every infantry had been trained for hours and days on how to dig one.

\*\*\*Tape Interrupt\*\*\*

**Rick:** Joel we were talking now just about the breakout out of Sand Low and what you...were there for x amount of days...

**Joel:** I can't remember exactly how many we...but during that period in that...on that peninsula where all these troops were there were still a lot of German soldiers also in there and people were shot from time to time. I was carrying a message from my G2 section over to a G3 section which is maybe a quarter of a mile away over some hilly terrain and suddenly I was stopped by a major and he says, "*Where are you going soldier*"? I said, "*oh I'm carrying a message from dada dada*", and he said, "*Look over at that field*". I look over at the field; he said, "*Do you see anything*"? I said "*no sir I don't see anything*". He says, "*there's two German soldiers in that field*", okay and he said "*you're carrying an M1, you're an infantry man*"? "*Yes sir*". He said "*put on your bayonet you and I are going after them*", and I said "*sir, I work for Colonel Welch over in G2 and I'm supposed to take...*", he said "*you'll do that when we come back*". So I slipped the bayonet on my rifle and I was already sweating of course and we walked into this field of high growth, it came up to here on me and as I walked in I said "*God, I won't be able to see anybody until I step on 'em*" and he says "*you know how to move and cover*"? I says "*sure*", he says "*you move I'll cover and we'll switch it back and forth*" and I said "*okay*". So we go through this field...we never found anything. I came back to my group after I'd gone through this sweating experience and I went into the tent and I proceeded to unload my rifle by the numbers and I guess because of nervousness I forgot to take the clip out so when I took out the live bullet the chamber automatically refilled again and I had the thing on the floor, the boot on the floor and I pressed the trigger and of course the gun went off and I was about 50 to 60 feet from the commanding general trailer, and this is still while we're locked up on that peninsula before anything broke out. He sent his aid over – what happened, whose shooting a gun in this compacted area with so many people? And he ordered that I be Court Marshaled for unauthorized...so I explained, I said I'd been out on this thing, this guy made me put a bayonet on the thing walking in the field...I didn't unload it right correctly. So I went to my colonel and I says, "*I've been ordered to be Court Marshaled*", he said "*go see the company commander, he'll have the papers*". I went to the company commander and I says "*I've been ordered to be Court Marshaled and I need to get the Court Marshal papers from you*". He said "*Court Marshal papers*"?, he said "*I have practically nothing, I don't have any Court Marshal papers*". This is again maybe 12 – 13 days after the invasion and he doesn't have any court...and I said, "*Well you just have to get them I guess*". Anyway time goes on and eventually we got...finally

he got the Court Marshal papers maybe ten days later. I get them all filled out, I get my witness; I had a first lieutenant that liked me he says, *"I'll defend you and I'll say that you did everything correctly"* and so forth. I put my Court Marshal papers on my G2 Chief – he was a Colonel and I put them in his in-box and I used to go in and out – he had a little bitty trailer that he lived in and so I would go in and out of there and I'd see my papers sitting in his in-box and they were sitting in his in-box. One day I walked in and they weren't in his in-box and I thought *'oh oh, here we go'* and he said, *"Shapiro, I think we can forget about this" ... "Boy – thank you sir"*. He said *"but be careful next time will ya"?* So...

**Rick:** What would they do if they Court marshaled you?

**Joel:** I haven't the slightest idea, and for shooting a rifle in a combat zone.

**Rick:** That's a good story.

**Joel:** People were shooting all over. I did guard duty at night fully armed and you're fully shavered, I mean my goodness everybody was armed. The only thing is I let it go outside of the general's trailer. It startled him.

**Rick:** Any other stories?

**Joel:** Oh you like war stories?

**Rick:** Well certainly. But lets...where did you go when you broke out and tell us leading up to how eventually got to Dachau.

**Joel:** Well, gee I should have got out the map shouldn't I, I have 15<sup>th</sup> Corp maps. Well the breakout of course went across...moved across France and into Germany, I mean the third army made that great sweep. You know Patton with his tanks, when you read about him in his memoirs and so forth, you know he was an audacious person and he always complained to Eisenhower that he wouldn't let him use his tanks with the speed that they should have been used

and the result you may recall that as the...just before Paris was liberated the third army was swung way to the south – south of Paris not way to the south but south of Paris and Patton wanted to go in. Instead they let the 2<sup>nd</sup> French armor division, the 2<sup>nd</sup> French Armored Division which is the liberating division of Paris and which was just to our right but at that time as Patton swung the third army way out to the right flank he actually separated the third army from really the main body that was moving westward and we ran out of food...again as I read the literature later, Patton was screaming for supplies and they gave us supplies, some gasoline to the troops that were moving forward. Patton's army stalled, they had no gas, no nothing. We were eating C-rations all the time. It was raining, it was wet and we just sat out there stalled, in fact there was a German division that could have cut off...I told you I was with an interrogation division, we knew there was a division that could almost have cut off the third army, because we were isolated, they had nothing, they couldn't move. So Jewish boys like myself went into discussion – “*what do we do with our dog tags*”? Do we leave them on? Do we throw them away? On the dog tag it says “H” – Hebrew. Well we went into some serious discussions because we thought we could very well be captured...do you keep your dog tag on? Do you throw it away and make up something? I kept mine on. But in the middle of all that there's another Patton story – we had virtually...rationed on drinking water, no gasoline, no fresh food and all of a sudden this truck comes in and it's spreading gravel, white gravel to our commanding general's tent – a little path of white gravel. We didn't know why that was happening, what it was – Patton was calling on the 15<sup>th</sup> Corp commander and drove up again in his command car, well dressed of course, again the pistols the whole thing and they had built this nice white gravel path from the roadway over to the general's trailer. It was very nice and he looked good. I didn't have a conversation with him that day but I saw him unload and walk in and walk out.

**Rick:** And then did you eventually serve in the Battle of the Bulge?

**Joel:** No, no, no. The 15<sup>th</sup> Corp eventually became assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> army, it was relieved from Patton's army. The Battle of the Bulge was north, we were south. No I had no connection with the Battle of the Bulge at all. That was in December / January, it was pretty quiet where we were. However, I can give you an interesting little funny story there – this interrogation team that we had that I worked with a little bit was composed of a first lieutenant – Sarmy Antello, I'll

never forget him and two Jewish kids who were German born. One came from Berlin and the other one came from Munich and these boys and their families had somehow escaped to the United States and were drafted into the army. They were a little bit older than I was – I was 23 and maybe they were 25, 26. And both of them had been sent to what they called *'the order of battle'*. The order of battle – the job of *'order of battle'* team is to find out what's out there, what's out in front, where is what, what are the units named and so forth. Now these two boys, German speaking American soldiers were a magnificent team of interrogators. And we interrogated not, nobody I guess under the rank of Captain from the German army, now in order for these boys to interrogate (I sat in and watched them, I had nothing to do it, I'm a watcher). In order for them to interrogate an officer and they were Sergeants, we had a cigar box full and he had to explain to his superiors why he was doing this, he collected a cigar box full of American GI soldier insignia so if he interrogated a captain, he put on a majors leaf and so forth. And he did that right up the scale. These two guys were absolutely marvelous and having German minds, they knew how to get stuff out of these guys and it was an amazing process to watch. They'd accumulate pictures and stories, they knew the culture, they knew the stories and they could make these (I say *'make'*), encourage these people to talk. They convinced them the war was over, that it was done and gone for. So these two young men working with a lieutenant that didn't know any more German than I knew did a marvelous job and before the Battle of the Bulge, these two young men told their ??? that it was their conclusion (I told you we were very much south), they came to the conclusion there was virtually no German defenses in the southern part of Germany and that everything had been moved to the north. They reported that and that went through channels and one day the General of the Army – 7<sup>th</sup> Army which we were now assigned to came storming into the 15<sup>th</sup> Corp and demanded to see the Colonel in charge (our Colonel) and said *"where did they get that information that there's nobody in front of us"*? He was furious, and he says to my team (and I happened to be sitting in the office, I happened to be sitting there) and he said *"get those men in here"* and of course the lieutenant starts to talk and he turns it over because he can't explain it, he turns it over to the Sergeant to explain to the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Commander why they came to this conclusion – because they had interviewed prisoners and that was their conclusion from their talking, there was no – nothing in front of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army, they had all moved north. And he said, *"I don't believe that, that's a bunch of bullshit"* and he stormed out. They had called it exactly right. So you know, that's something you didn't know

then, I only knew it afterward and so here's a couple of Jewish immigrants from Germany who did call it right.

**Rick:** That's interesting. Well now tell us...you were one of the first people into the Dachau Concentration Camp.

**Joel:** No, not the first. I was a tourist. I had nothing to do with the forces that liberated that cleared Dachau. I came in as a...well let's give a timeline; you gotta get a timeline here. Roosevelt – FDR died on April 12<sup>th</sup>, Dachau was cleared or '*liberated*' that is the American troops came through – I don't know the exact date, I think it's April 30<sup>th</sup>, that could be substantiated, it may have been May 1<sup>st</sup> but it was right there – April 30<sup>th</sup>, May 1<sup>st</sup>. Because I had worked and was working in the 15<sup>th</sup> Corp G2 section I was aware of what was going on in units to the left and to the right and in front of us and so forth. So I knew that Dachau had been cleared, so that's how I became a visitor to Dachau. Another buddy of mine, we borrowed a jeep as it were and drove to Dachau. I don't recall how far it was from where we were, not too far maybe 20 miles, 25 miles – I was close enough to say I wanted to go there. I didn't ask anybody's permission by the way, I just went and that's how I came to Dachau. So I had nothing to do with any noble cause of clearing Dachau.

**Rick:** But it was a couple of days...

**Joel:** It was the day after, maybe the second day – either the first or the second day and at that time of course Dachau which was a huge installation, it's not like a little campground – I don't know how many thousands of people there, maybe 25, 30, maybe more – it's a huge installation and the main gate was being guarded by GI's of course when we drove up. There was no law and order, things were not in order, things were not being well done and well planned. There was GI's at the gate, just standing guard – not to keep me out but to keep the irony of it all – the prisoners in because they couldn't allow these thousands of people to just dash out into the town and besides most of them were so emaciated they couldn't dash very far in any event. So the big problem was – whatever supplies, medical and food was being brought in, which the army was not prepared to do, it's like Iraq. Did you know what you were there to do? I mean they weren't

ready for that and of course they did bring it in eventually. When I got there it was just still pandemonium, everybody's walking around in circles and so forth and so on. Can I pause here and say something else? You've asked me to talk about being witness to Dachau which I was. I saw and acknowledged degradation but I don't know if you can talk about victims, those people in the camps unless you also think about the perpetrators, the murderers, the events which put them where they were. The Holocaust as we refer to it, the extermination of 6 million Jews and perhaps 5 million others was not an accident. It was organized, not by uneducated people; it was not put together by people who didn't have pants on, who hadn't gone to school. It was put together, it was planned, it was willed into being and it was methodically organized by the most intellectualized, educated nation in the Western world. If we think of Germany as it was then we have to think of it as a thousand of mathematical accomplishments, artistic accomplishments, unparalleled musicianship, composers, philosophers – Germany led the world in intellectual accomplishments so when we think about the victims we have to think about the perpetrators and if there is a lesson – is it a lesson that the brightest and the best can do the most evil? Or is it a lesson with complacency in other places? It's been said that FDR could have done more, he could have bombed the rails going into the camps which they knew about but he couldn't spare the planes. It's been said that the camps themselves could have been bombed – they couldn't spare the planes. It's been said that the church, the Catholic Church turned its head aside and did not use its strength to stop it. So all the things that could have been said need to be said. The Holocaust didn't just come about; it came about because evil triumphed over the best of spirits. The worst won – not the best. And we still have you know amongst us in this world, we still have Holocaust deniers. In fact they exist in the United States and there are some in academic circles. Some have gone so far to say the Holocaust never occurred, it's a propaganda, it's an imaginative thing. Others have said with some strength that it really wasn't all that bad – oh yes it happened, but it really wasn't that bad – the 6 million, the 5 million, that's a bunch of exaggeration. In fact they took a poll of some young German teenagers not too long ago in Germany in which 15 to 20 percent of the respondents – young people, young people not older people said that what they had learned about the Holocaust they thought it was a great exaggeration. But it was no exaggeration and whatever witness that I am – it's my duty to tell you that there is no exaggeration – I saw it! I was there! I touched it, I smelled it, I heard it and I took pictures of it with my own little camera. So those who deny or those who say there was

exaggerations strike at my heart and they strike at my memory and they strike at the hearts and memory of all civilized people. The Holocaust is not to be forgotten. Never again!

**Rick:** Joel, tell us in as much detail as you can – you’re experiences of entering the camp, the smells, the feelings and so forth.

**Joel:** Okay. The first thing as I say the camp was under guard by GI’s and people couldn’t get out; I had no trouble walking in. They didn’t care why we came in or we didn’t come in. So at first I just sort of literally just walked around in circles looking at these emaciated bodies crowded around me. I had in my pocket cigarettes and chocolate bars but I realized very quickly I daresent pull them out as I’d really be mobbed, you know there’s a terrible contrast there between seeing hunger and having bread in your hand (chocolate bars) and being afraid to hand it out and that was my first experience. Of course I’m fully armed, I have a pistol in my belt, a rifle over my shoulder but I knew what would happen, I could see what would happen. So I walked around really just idly and suddenly a voice came and it said in perfect English “*May I help you. Is there anything I could show you around*”, something like that and I turn around and here’s this young fellow about my age, maybe a bit older speaking beautiful English and eventually...where did you learn it, he told me “*I matriculated in England*” [British accent]. That is he’d gone to school or finished high school, I don’t know exactly what he meant, but anyway he’d been trained in English. I believe he was a Czech, I’m not totally sure and you must remember that in that camp there were not just Jewish prisoners there were others, there was Polish prisoners, there were political prisoners, there were the Gypsies, there were the gays, there were anybody – the elderly and weak you know Hitler decided to clear out from the people anybody who didn’t fit and that included the sick, the weak, the gays, the Jews, the Gypsies – they didn’t fit. So that camp was a compound of many kinds of people. So after this young man said ‘*may I show you around*’ or something of that sort, I of course said “yes” and it is he who really took me to the corners of the places and to the things that I saw. I...the first thing that strikes you when you go into a place like Dachau and it would be no different than other concentration camps where the people that you looked at. When you look at skinny people and you say ‘*gosh that person is skinny*’ or ‘*she sure is skinny*’, you have no idea what skinny looks like. They aren’t skinny. These people for the most part who were still alive were in the last

extremes of starvation. Their countenance has degraded, all you see is a high cheekbone, there's no flesh, it hangs. The jawbone is skeletal. There seems no connection between the eyes and the jaw, in fact faces are almost interchangeable because the human body under starvation conditions devours itself, it eats upon itself, it eats its own flesh as it were, it takes from itself to survive. So what you have left are tendons and bones. As you look at the legs you see nothing but a knobby knee, it looks like a bulge and above it and below you see virtually nothing but tendons. The body has devoured itself. So faces become interchangeable, eyes are so far sunk that the flesh around the eyes has no meaning, it just doesn't...it gives very little expression to the face. I had the sense that everybody looked alike – that sounds crazy to say but when you see those emaciated, devoured bodies walking around and you see nothing but tendons and cords and bones, everybody looks alike. Now I'm not saying that every person was there like that but the great bulk of them that I saw were. Some had arrived only recently were perhaps in better shape. But the survivors, those who were able to walk around that's the way they looked and that accounts for the fact I was afraid to put my hand in my pocket and take out a chocolate bar.

**Rick:** Tell us....

\*\*\*Tape Interrupt\*\*\*

**Joel:** I was alone and they would gather around me in little circles and follow me around. They quickly understood that we didn't have a language of communication. I couldn't understand them, they couldn't understand me. They said things; I don't know what they said. All I did is look and they looked at me and many would come up and touch you and you know said things that said '*thanks*' I suppose, maybe they said '*thanks*', maybe they said '*get me food*', I don't know. The conversations that I had were through this guy who took me around and when I told you about that the polish officer....

**Rick:** Joel we've got about fifteen minutes and we've got to wrap it up. I want to go through the stacking room and maybe that experience of when Roosevelt died and then you can tell us about Burchess Garden and then coming home and seeing even the Statue of Liberty which is probably...so let's go ahead and tell us more about these...

**Joel:** Well eventually...so my escort took me to the crematorium. Now the crematorium, you've seen pictures of it and so forth, this is the place where the inmates when they were decided to be disposed of, were told to undress, be naked and to walk into this shower room. The shower room of course was the death room where the Cyclone B that gas was released through the ceiling and that took about 10 to 12 minutes to kill everybody in the room – men, women, whoever might be there. From the Cyclone B gas room a short few paces where what I have described as two 'stack rooms', when I saw them. And bear in mind this is just a couple of days after the German army has left. These two stack rooms that I named them were rooms that were maybe eighteen feet square something like that in which the bodies from the crematorium after having been gassed were literally stacked in piles. Just hither and yon, there was no orderliness about laying logs out or bodies out, they had just been thrown in a stack and in each of these two rooms there was a parametal stack of bodies. Naked and again as we show the pictures, skeletal in look. Then, again another irony – what are you going to do with these two stack rooms full of hundreds of gassed bodies, so the irony of it is that the American GI's being helped by healthier inmates completed Hitler's task. The bodies were placed on a gurney, a steel gurney which is about two bodies long, two at a time. The gurney went down a track into the furnace room where it was received by workers, tipped sideways into the furnace. So the irony of it was that these last people who were maybe gassed yesterday or the day before again went nameless into the furnace and the smoke went up the chimney. Now prior to that, before going in to the camp directly there's a railroad spur that came into the camp where the trains came, boxcars mostly and people would be unloaded from the boxcars and marched into the camp. Well, I don't know what happened, I wasn't there but when the German army retreated there must have been a couple of shipments come in of human cargo and the boxcar doors were open and as the pictures will show, those people in the in the boxcars were simply machine gunned as far as I can determine because the back of the walls of the boxcar show bullet pits and the pictures that you have shows those people just lying on the floor of the boxcar having been machine gunned. In other words they never got unloaded, they didn't make it to the crematorium, they made it to Dachau but they were machine gunned down before they could be unloaded. So that was one of the ironies that the GI's had to supervise healthier inmates complete the disposal, the end extermination of the last few hundred people from the stack rooms.

**Rick:** Now Roosevelt died right towards the end of the war and can you relate what went on after that?

**Joel:** Well my escort took me to...he said *"I want you to meet my barracks commander"*. Now if you remember seeing pictures of these barracks in the various concentration camps, they're basically very crowded, three tiers high, people were still walking around there as you've seen in the movies clutching onto blankets, stealing each others shoes and so forth and so on...these barracks are three deep, three high and up in the corner is the barracks commander. Now the reason he wanted me to meet his barracks commander, he said, *"my barracks commander is a wonderful man, he's an exceptional man. He's fair, he's honest"*. What he was talking about was that the barracks commander had from time to time had to pull out the people for the death march to the crematorium. How would you like to have that responsibility? But he talked about that man in glowing terms so finally I said *"yes of course I'd like to meet him if you'll talk for me, yes"*. So we went to meet the barracks commander and it turned out he was a Polish officer, I don't know what rank but he looked very military. But he was very sick; he was flat out on a cot. He was separated from the three tiered bunks by a little curtain so he had his own little place and he introduced me and we started to talk and the first thing he asked through this young man was *"where are the Russians, where are the Russians, where are the Russians"*? Well I had an idea where they were because being in Shitzu I had some sense but not a very accurate sense, I didn't know exactly where they were, I tried to dig into my mind but he said *"the Americans must go to Berlin, the Americans must go to Berlin, don't let the Russians go to Berlin"*. Well I knew that they were close but I didn't know exactly where and of course they were very close, they were there virtually. Then he got through with that and he raised himself up on his elbows and through the interpreter he said, *"who is this Harry Truman! Why did they make him president of the United States? He doesn't know how to run a war! Why didn't they pick somebody else who could run a war – not Harry Truman, who is he? He came from no place he was only a Senator"*! So here I am and now I feel I have to explain to a poor shrunken Polish officer who's very European, very political the constitutional process of the United States. So explained to him he's the Vice President etcetera and I explained – I knew Harry Truman had worked on this un-American committee, un-American activities committee – I knew a little bit

about Harry Truman because I read about him so I explained and I said *“this is the way...”* *“Well they shouldn’t have had him, they should’ve had somebody else. General Eisenhower should have been running the war”*. He said, *“what does he know about running a war”*, I says, *“He’ll do it”*. So that was a little something on the lighter side but yet very important to this Polish officer inmate who understands America because he doesn’t understand why Harry Truman should be running the war. Now you’ve got to remember this is only...VE day is May 8<sup>th</sup> and I’m talking about May 1 and 2 so we’re only a few days away from the end. But I didn’t know that, I knew it a few days later but I didn’t know it then.

**Rick:** Well now tell us how did you get over to...about going into Burchess Garden.

**Joel:** Well now the war is over now and our headquarters, 15<sup>th</sup> Corp headquarters gradually moved south, south, south and we ended up in Salzburg Austria which is a very pretty lovely town, I’m glad I saw that – Mozart and all that stuff. I remember it very well and it was fun. We stayed there a long time, I went to a spa and went in and undressed and was still carrying all my armament and next to me was a German soldier undressing and we both went into the sweat box together – not together, he there and me there but it was weird, he’s taking off his uniform and I’m taking off mine but that was something. But at the same time Burchess Garden is not far, you take a road up a very beautifully oiled road up to the *‘Eagles Nest’* as Hitler called it and that was the last read out and there were the homes of Gering, Hitler and Boreman I guess it was – Martin Boreman. All of which houses had been bombed, messed up, destroyed and the structure’s still standing of course and so of course the GI’s are running up there with trucks and jeeps and this is again before there was order. We think of the military having everything in order, well if you’ve been in army – order does take place after chaos, but first there’s chaos then there’s order. Right? So in both the instances of Dachau and my going up to the Eagles Nest were quite situations of chaos preceding order. I went into Hitler’s hole; I went downstairs into his apartment and Eva Braun’s apartment which was art-deco by the way – very nicely done, compact. Went through Gering’s place and so forth. I had a buddy who I went up with, he was an art student and the next day he said to me *“there was a beautiful tapestry hanging on the wall of Gering’s house, I would like to get that, will you help me get it”?* He said, *“You’re the only one who will help me get it. You understand (he spoke with an accent I think he was French)”*

*why I want that tapestry can you get it”?* He said *“it’s on the wall, we’ll get a jeep with a winch because it’s stuck under something”*. So we went up there and here’s this tapestry hanging and it’s full of dirt and messed up and there’s a bar – a structural bar across it and we hitched up the winch on the jeep and started to pull back and instead of the bar lifting up, the jeep lifted up. In other words you couldn’t get it out. I later learned by reading a Time Magazine about a month later that that tapestry that this kid was trying to get belongs to Belgium and it’s a national art treasure and it was such a national art treasure that it had warranted being written up all over the world and this guy was trying to get it out and I was trying help him you know.

**Rick:** And then there were some tunnels underneath those homes I guess?

**Joel:** Well I didn’t traverse a tunnel between any of those three homes. I did go into the basements of them but I didn’t traverse the tunnel. I couldn’t speak to that. I can speak to Gering’s wine – the great conisuer of all that is lovely and perfect in Europe who looted Europe of all its art and wine. Kids from our unit went up (why do I say kids? Soldiers! We were all kids). Soldiers went up to Gering’s house and came back with literally truckloads, jeep loads of wine. Jeep loads of wine and liquors. So what of course the kids were looking for was strong drink. Well they’d take these bottles of wine and sit around and pull the cork and take a swig and *‘gosh this tastes like....’* And they’d throw the bottle down on the rock. The place was littered with broken wine bottles. So I always chuckled at how much of Gering’s superb wine ended up on the dirt because the American GI’s didn’t know good wine from trash.

**Rick:** Did you get up to the very top of the Eagles Nest then?

**Joel:** Well yeah, the Eagles Nest is the top of the pinnacle of the mountain which has a plateau on the top of course and that’s where the three homes were and that’s what they called the Eagles Nest.

**Rick:** They were at the base – weren’t they at the base and Eagle Nest was up top?

**Joel:** Not to my memory. When you took this beautiful road up, this big wide road as I recall, maybe I've got it wrong but that's my memory picture...you know when we tell war stories sometimes its hard to know where memory breaks off and a little extra exposition dribbles in. I'm doing the best I can, I'm trying to exclude any amplification and just stick with what I saw – now if you asked me where was the Eagles Nest, in my mind it was up the top of that road where the three homes were and they called that the Eagles Nest. Now if I've got that wrong, I've got it wrong. But I was in those three homes. And I remember Hitler's house had a gorgeous picture window – a huge picture window as big as that wall which looked out over the valley. It was a gorgeous view – there was no glass in the window but the structure was still there.

**Rick:** How did you get back to the states then and how long after?

**Joel:** I didn't walk back. Well as the war wound down and they started sending home...and you went home on points, that is the longer you'd been over seas the more points you had. The group I was with all had more points than I had. I was over seas the better part of two years but the group I was with all had more points so I was really almost the last one to leave. Our whole officer group had been replaced. A new colonel came in, he called me in he says "*sergeant when are you going home*"? I said "*I guess I'm the last*", I said "*I should be called within the next two or three weeks*", he said "*would you...how would you think about staying and helping me*"? And I said, "*well, I don't know*", he says "*have you got a wife*"? "*No*", "*have you got a girlfriend*"? "*No*". He said, "*What will it take for you to stay here for a few weeks and get this place organized*"? "*I said sir I'd like two things*", I said "*I'd like a PPK pistol*" that was a little German pistol everybody wanted, I had a Luger and I said "*I'd like a week on the Riviera*". He says, "*You got it*". So I had a weeks leave to the French Riviera and when I came back I got the PPK which I still have in the original box and I stayed on for I guess six or eight weeks and helped this new guy who just came from the states recreate that little group.

**Rick:** Were you there during VJ day?

**Joel:** August – yeah because I came home in January so the war was over in May and I didn't come until January so obviously, yes.

**Rick:** Do you remember the day of when the German's surrendered?

**Joel:** When the Japanese surrendered? Well not as thoroughly as I remember VE Day when I was there and the soldiers ran out and started shooting up and screaming and getting drunk and everything. I think VJ was sort of an after, I mean everybody was happy they knew they weren't going to be shifted somewhere else. I guess that is when the really, actually this began the sending of people home; I probably should put it in that context. That's when they started sending people home because it was towards the end of the year when this guy asked me to stay on, maybe it was September or August or somewhere in there.

**Rick:** Tell us about those last experiences Joel.

**Joel:** Well my escort, this young man who had picked me up and was taking me around asked me, sort of in a sort of subdued voice I remember it very clearly he said, "*Would you like to see our hospital?*" and I said, "*A hospital? What kind of a hospital is there?*" and he said, "*Well to some people get taken to the hospital and sometimes they're given something,*" he said, "*its not very nice, you wouldn't want to see it.*" And I said, "*Take me to your hospital.*" And again the hospital was just a large barracks and we walked in the door and of course the first thing that strikes you is the aroma, the stink. And I walked up and down the aisles and really pandemonium broke loose, I might have been, perhaps I was the first American soldier to walk into that "*so-called*" hospital. In that "*so-called*" hospital were people in all stages in the end of life, I would say 20-25% of them were already dead they were just lying there. Again, it was chaos, nobody had moved in to clear out or take care of the dead or remove them, others were lying there with open sores, deformed faces, limbs, none of them could move. As I walked down the aisles these bony things would come out just to touch my skin, touch my uniform, it was a terrible experience and in a way I felt I had to do it and believe me I couldn't wait to get out of it. I remember two days later writing home to my mom and dad and rehearsing some of the stuff we talked about and I said, "*I can't get the smell out of my nose.*" I came back to camp and I took all the clothes I had on and took them off to bathe and I kept smelling that for days. I couldn't believe it, it was though there was something stuck in the crevices of my olfactory nerves that

wouldn't let go, the neurosystem wouldn't let go of that smell and it took days, I kept smelling Dachau for days, I won't say forever but for days, for several days. It wouldn't leave; the nerves neurosystem I guess was just so overwhelmed with it, what I left was a smell. The rest I can still picture up here.

**Rick:** When you did go home, did you take a ship back to the United States?

**Joel:** Yeah, one of those rolling ships then everybody got sick and the ship lost all its water, and oh yeah it was a great experience.

**Rick:** Then you landed in New York?

**Joel:** Landed in New York, we discharged and I asked to be discharged in New York because then again my mother and dad were coming to meet me. So they met me in New York and my dad had a lot of family in that area, and they brought with me a suit that I had, a brown suit which was the only significant apparel I had for quite awhile was a little brown suit. I'm not a person who was lacking in patriotism, I am a, I get tears in my eyes when a flag goes by. On the other hand I'm not a jingoist, I don't think it has to be displayed and stuck on the table at every event. So yes, when I saw Miss Liberty coming into it was quite a sight, but I was ready for that I was not unready for it, I knew where I was going and I knew what I was going to experience. So I can't talk as emotionally about that as I can about the other, now that may seem strange to you but I was, I accepted America for what I knew America to be and what I, that was already internalized I didn't have to be shocked about it.

**Sally:** Did you think, "*Who could have done this? How did this happen?*"

**Joel:** Well Sally you've got to remember, again its not a matter of boasting, I was not an ignorant person. I grew up as a Jewish kid in Salt Lake City; I had the experiences like any Jewish kid at that time. I had the experience in grade school of being called a "*Christ killer*" and all that kind of stuff. When I was at East High and had the experience of having a very nice teacher who had gone on a summer trip to Germany, and this was before the war of '38, and had

come back and regaled us in the class about the wonders of Germany and the Autoban; which it really was it was way ahead of anything we had done in the United States, the great Autoban Highways were magnificent of course for their time and far ahead of, we never dreamed of having Highways until President Eisenhower said, *"Let us have Highways"* and we had Highways. Well the Autobans existed then, so I can remember her declaiming on the wonders of the Autoban and the wonders of the trains being actually on time, which they were not in the United States and so forth. And I remember coming home and discussing this with my mom and dad and also that was at a time Sally, have you ever heard of Father Coglan? Well you should, he's part of the pre-war thing. Father Coglan was a Catholic Priest who was an anti-Semite from the word *"Go"*. He was on the radio every Sunday and declaiming really Hitler's chatter. So we had in America in the '37-38 period and Father Coglan was a national figure this wasn't an isolated thing he was on every Sunday and other figures there was the Brown Shirts were organizing in New York City, there were the Brown Shirts and they wore brown shirts because they were emulating history and they had rallies in Madison Square Garden. So America was aware of the Nazi-Hitler Organization, its aims, and its general emotional content and we had people talking about it. Lindberg of course was the outstanding big figure, public figure that took the Hitler side; he spoke for Germany and so forth. But Lindberg was one of many; he was just a national figure. You ought to read that book he just wrote on that, it's interesting. Anyway, what I'm saying is, I was not ignorant when I walked through those doors, I had a background of being who I am, of hearing of talking of observing what was going on in the world, there were the Brown Shirts in New York and the this and the that and the Father Coglans and so on. So I didn't come with an empty head. Was I shocked? Of course I was shocked but the question you asked, *"Did I think 'How could this of been done?'"* I was asked that question much earlier in its way. I understood what I was seeing, I knew where it was coming from, it wasn't a big shock. Plus the Jewish community had attempted in that '38-39 period and '40 to bring pressure to bear to allow immigration from Germany and so forth and other parts of the world. If you speak of it from that standpoint you have to remember that when Hitler started he said, *"Let's get rid of the Jews, free of Jews."* And he was willing so it seems to let him get on automobiles on trains or boats and get the hell out, *"Free Germany."* Well that was a good idea from his viewpoint, the only trouble was the world didn't want that and there was not a country on this planet that wanted to take in any Jews from Germany. So his next step was the

extermination, so the extermination came somewhat later, the extermination really didn't start until '43-44 that's when that huge burning... we heard the word "*final solution*" the final solution was not the export of humans it was the incineration of humans that were in the way. So I came in Sally not with a hollow head.